

Writer finds challenge irresistible

Imagine meeting your childhood sweetheart again; can you remember that first innocent love?

Margaret Drury Gane could, and the result is an engrossing first novel.

Parade On An Empty Street recounts a boy's awkward struggle to befriend an orphan girl. Isolated from normal childhood by the legacy of a sordid family tragedy, the girl finds hope in the boy's attention. And after she moves away, it is twenty years, a world war, and a divorce, before they accidentally meet again.

Drury Gane, a Kingsway resident, says that the novel was born on the subway: "A young woman got on who reminded me of this little butterfly girl I had known as a child. I wondered how she got from there to here. All of a sudden I had my story."

The novel draws heavily on Drury Gane's childhood in West Toronto just before World War 2.

"Once I started writing it all came pouring back," she says. But for the fiction version she portrayed herself as a boy. "A boy's role added a balance and tension," she says. "I wanted his freewheeling antics to break the girl out of her imprisonment."

Relaxing in her plush Kingsway home, it's hard to picture Margaret Drury Gane as an expert on imprisonment. But the perpetual cigarette and staccato delivery hint of unseen strain: "writing is like scuba diving in your head," she says. "You have to submerge yourself in all those bits of lint collected in your life, and get out as much as you can."

Drury Gane has been "diving" for a long time. She remembers as a child rejecting traditional children's books like *Spot the Dog* to write her own stories. At 14 years old she wrote a novel. She laughs: "It was the most extraordinarily bad book. I cried over it, it was so moving. But when I send it to a publisher it came back in record time—rejected."

She wrote ad copy for Eatons for seven years, then dropped out to marry, and to raise a family. But by the mid-1970's her children were growing up. She needed a new challenge.

"Feminism was at its height and I'm a feminist," she says. "I wanted to put action where my mouth was. I wanted to stretch my limits."

She gave herself 5 years to become a successful writer. "Five years offered me a protective device against rejection," she recalls. "I wouldn't give up too soon, I would keep going no matter what."

But within two years the need for protection was forgotten. Canada's top magazines were soon publishing her work. She sold short stories to *Chatelaine* and *Saturday Night*, wrote cover stories for *Weekend* magazine, and became one of its Contributing Editors.

"I'm a mixmaster," she says. "I can take a popular issue and



A widely-published writer who considers herself a feminist, Margaret Drury Gane nonetheless portrayed herself as a boy in her recent novel,

"*Parade On An Empty Street*", saying the switch added a needed balance and tension to the story.

photos by Bill Dunphy

beat it up so everyone gets involved. If the editors see that ability they'll give you good jobs."

She won national notoriety for a scathing piece called "Mother's Day Is A Sham." With wickedly rational strokes she debunked the sugary niceties of Mother's Day. She portrayed it as an empty gesture masking the low value society really places on motherhood.

The vicious public reaction strengthened her. "The critical letters worried me at first," she says. "Spelling out an insight leaves you wide open to attack. But I realized I didn't have a choice—it's a fact of life in writing."

Yet Drury Gane refuses to teach the facts of life to other writers.

find out and try to explain, the less you feel you *really* know."

And the idea that writing simply flows from the pen is a magnificent myth. On some days she struggles to complete just one paragraph.

"The stress of sitting under the tension of creativity for long periods takes its toll. It's essential to have a physical outlet."

Perversely, after all the struggles, success often leads to new problems.

"Friends and family are very different when you're published," she says. "Once they detect a relative in the story they suddenly realize that they might be next to appear."

And critics seem to raise their standards. "You're fine as long as you're an amateur," she says. "Everyone supports a hobby. But once you're successful, people seem to impose new rules to follow."

But it's worth it. Drury Gane glows as she talks of her writing.

"Though I feel insecure at times, at the bottom I'm really very confident. Publishers or reviewers can't kill me—they can only say 'no.'"

She recalls her excitement when she first saw her printed book.

"It smelled new. I'd never smelled a new book."

The novel is selling steadily and has now been published in the United States and Great Britain. A large print version for the visually handicapped has proved successful.

And she's now well into her second novel. It's a thousand times harder than the first, she claims.

"Once you've purged the autobiographical in the first one, you can't rely on the past anymore. You have to be more inventive."

But the challenge is irresistible. "It's a kind of craziness," she explains. "My ego gets hurt but I have to hold on. I'm really writing all the time. Even when I'm cooking dinner I'm whittling with an idea."

And at some point the writing takes on its own life.

"I get up after lunch and realize I have to give Veronica something to say. My fictional character has become a person—and she's waiting for me upstairs at my desk."

Villager's INTERESTING People

by Wayne Yetman



Drury Gane works in a second floor study of her home, a luxury only recently allowed her.

"Writers are born, not made," she insists. "The ability to feed facts that you see and others don't, is a gift—I can't see how you can learn it."

But she has a clear warning to those who lust to see their words in print.

"The euphoria of a great paragraph is short-lived," she says. "So is the aura of saying 'I'm a writer.' The more you